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# THE Lancashire Collier Girl.

## A TRUE STORY.

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THE

# Lancaſhire Collier Girl.

## A TRUE STORY.

IN a ſmall village in Lancaſhire there lived a few years ago, an induſtrious man and his wife, who had ſix children. The man himſelf uſed to work in a neighbouring colliery, while the wife took care of the family, attended alſo to their little farm, and minded the dairy, and when all her other work was done, ſhe uſed conſtantly to ſit down to ſpin. It will naturally be ſuppoſed that the children of ſuch a mother, even when very young, were not ſuffered to be idle. The eldeſt daughter worked with the mother at the ſpinning-wheel, which ſhe learnt to think a very pleaſant employment, and ſhe ſometimes accompanied her work with a cheerful hymn, or a good moral ſong, which her parents had taken care to teach her.

But the ſecond daughter of the name of *Mary* is the chief ſubject of the preſent ſtory: when this girl

girl was nine years old, the honeſt collier finding that he had but little employment for her above ground, took her to work with him down in the coal-pit, together with one of his boys, who was then no more than ſeven yeafs of age. Theſe two children readily put their ſtrength to the baſket; dragging the coals from the workmen to the mouth of the pit; and by their joint labours they did the duty of one of thoſe men, who are commonly called "the drawers", clearing thereby no leſs than ſeven ſhillings a week for their parents. It muſt be owned to be not impoſſible, that they may have ſometimes exerted themſelves even beyond their ſtrength; which is now and then the caſe with little children, through the fault of thoſe who exact the work from them; but ſince in this caſe the father had an eye to them during the hours of labour, while they had a prudent and tender mother alſo, to look after them at home, there is no particular reaſon to ſuppoſe, that at the time of which we are now ſpeaking, they were ever much over-worked.

Here then let us ſtop to remark how different was the caſe of this numerous family from that of many others, in the ſame humble ſituation of life. *Mary* and her brother, ſo far from being a burthen, were bringing a little fortune to their parents, even when they were eight or ten years old: all the family were getting forward by the help of theſe little creatures, and their worldly comforts were now increaſing on every ſide.

But alas! in the midſt of this cheerful and con-

tented diligence, on one fatal day, while the good man was in the act of fixing a baſket, in order to its being wound up, the children ſtanding near him in the coal-pit, ſome ſtones fell from the top of the pit, one of which fell on the father's head, and killed him on the ſpot. What a melancholy event was this! ſome diſmal circumſtances alſo remain to be told, which were the conſequences of it; but in order to relieve the pain of my reader, I will here remark, that the moſt grievous afflictions are often appointed by providence, to be the means, in one way or other, of calling ſome extraordinary virtue into exerciſe; and accordingly we ſhall ſee that the calamity which is now ſpoken of, will introduce *Mary*, the young collier girl, to the farther good opinion of the reader.

The mother, on hearing the news of her huſband's death, together with the deſcription of the ſad accident which gave occaſion to it, received ſuch a ſhock, that her mind was not able to bear up under it; ſhe became diſordered in her underſtanding, nor did ſhe to the end of her life recover her ſenſes. Being now rendered extremely helpleſs, ſhe was ſeparated from her children by the pariſh officers, who continued to take the charge of her for the ſpace of five years. A ſhort time after the father's death, the eldeſt daughter, (the ſpinner) married, and went from home; two of the brothers, (of the ages of nine and ſeven,) were bound apprentices by the pariſh, which alſo took the charge of two others, (one three years old, the other an infant) until they ſhould be

ſufficiently

ſufficiently grown up to be bound out alſo.

In this place I cannot avoid obſerving, what a bleſſing it is to poor people in this country, that pariſh officers are obliged, in all ſuch caſes of neceſſity as that of which I am now ſpeaking, to give maintenance to thoſe, who apply to them, and what a pity it is that this wiſe and merciful proviſion of our laws ſhould ever be abuſed. *Mary*, the girl of whom we are giving the hiſtory, having been already trained to induſtry, was by no means diſpoſed to ſeek any unneceſſary help from the pariſh, and being now between eleven and twelve years old, ſhe determined to maintain herſelf, like a little independent woman, by her uſual work in the coal-pit, where ſhe was generally able after this time to earn at leaſt a ſhilling a day; in three or four years afterwards earning no leſs than two ſhillings. And now I would aſk my young female readers, what they think was the manner in which ſhe employed all this fruit of her induſtry? Do you imagine that ſhe laid it out in vanity of dreſs, in nice eating and drinking, or other needleſs expence? or do you ſuppoſe that ſhe would now indulge herſelf in idleneſs on one or two days in the week, becauſe ſhe had got enough for herſelf to live upon during the four or five working days? no: I truſt you will have formed no ſuch expectation: I hope you will be well aware what *Mary* did with her money, by having already reflected what you would have done with it in the like caſe. She in the firſt place releaſed the pariſh from the burthen of maintaining her mother, which ſhe did

as ſoon as ſhe was arrived at the age of ſixteen, being extremely anxious to take this poor diſordered helpleſs parent home to live with herſelf: ſhe then relieved the pariſh officers from the charge of one of her brothers, and ſhe continued to provide for him, until he died. Having been taught never to conſider her duty as done, while any part of it ſeemed to be left undone, ſhe afterwards undertook the maintenance of one of her other brothers, who remained with her during ſixteen weeks illneſs, at the end of which period ſhe followed him to the grave, burying him at her own expence. After about ſeven years the mother died alſo, and was buried in like manner by this dutiful child, without any aſſiſtance from the pariſh.

If any of my readers ſhould here inquire, how it could be poſſible for ſo young a child to ſupport all theſe relations, many of them being alſo occaſionally very burthenſome through their ſickneſs? the anſwer is, that in the caſe of theſe extraordinary calls upon her, ſhe uſed to betake herſelf to extraordinary labour, ſometimes earning no leſs than three ſhillings and ſix-pence in the four and twenty hours, by taking what is called "a double turn" in the coal-pits.

The ready ſubmiſſion of *Mary* to her parents when ſhe was in early life, is ſo pleaſing a part of her character, that it may be proper in this place again to make a remark upon it. Let my young readers recollect that in ſubmiſſion to the command of her father, or rather to that law of

God.

God which enjoins parental obedience, ſhe cheerfully followed him down into the coal-pit, burying herſelf in the bowels of the earth, and there at a tender age, without excuſing herſelf on account of her ſex, ſhe joined in the ſame work with the miners, a race of men rough indeed, but highly uſeful to the community, of whom I am alſo happy to ſay that they have the character of being honeſt and faithful, as well as remarkably courageous, and that they have given moreover ſome ſtriking inſtances of their readineſs to receive religious inſtruction, when offered to them. Among theſe men, to their honor be it ſpoken, *Mary's* virtue was ſafe, and after the death of her father, ſhe is even ſaid to have received protection, as well as aſſiſtance from them; her fatigue having been ſometimes leſſened, through their lending her a helping hand, with great feeling and kindneſs.

But though *Mary's* mind was naturally ſtrong, and her conſtitution of body was very ſtout alſo, yet towards the end of the period which has been ſpoken of, ſhe began to be bowed down in ſome meaſure, by the afflictions and labors which ſhe had endured. It was evident that ſhe had now been led to exert herſelf beyond her ſtrength. How lamentable is it, that while ſo many people in the world are idle, and are contracting diſeaſes both of body and mind, from the abundance of their riches, and from the want of ſome wholeſome and uſeful exerciſe, there ſhould be any bending like *Mary*, under their work, hidden

in

in coal-pits, or from ſome cauſe or other removed from obſervation! what a pity is it I ſay, that the former ſhould not employ a little of their time and money in endeavouring to find theſe diſtreſſed objects! And I may alſo add, how lamentable a thing is it, that while ſo many poor people are ſeen, who are apt to complain too ſoon, there ſhould be any, who do not tell their diſtreſſes to thoſe who can help them (which I truſt however does not often happen) till it is almoſt too late!

I was obſerving that *Mary* began about this time evidently to loſe her ſtrength, and her head was alſo troubled by ſome of thoſe ſtrange and unpleaſant imaginations, which are known by perſons converſant with the diſeaſes of the poor, to be no unuſual conſequence of bad food, and great bodily fatigue, joined with exceſſive grief. At firſt ſhe was not aware that ſhe laboured under any diſorder, for ſhe had ſeldom experienced ill health, while her relations were alive; and it ſeems probable that the comfort which ſhe derived from the reflection of affording them ſupport, and the pleaſing ſenſations which aroſe during the exerciſe of her attention to them, had ſerved both to keep up her ſpirits, and to prevent her conſtitution from breaking down.

I truſt it is not ſuperſtitious to ſuppoſe that when ſincere chriſtians come, as Mary now did, into very trying circumſtances, they may hope, notwithſtanding any appearances to the contrary, to experience ſtill, in one way or other, the peculiar bleſſing of Heaven; I do not expect that ſuch

perſons

perſons will be free from pain, poverty, or ſickneſs, or other worldly evils, for it is often quite the contrary, but then I believe that theſe very afflictions will be made the means of encreaſing their truſt in God, and prove in the end, (I mean either here or hereafter) to have been entirely deſigned for their good.

The calamities of *Mary* were now riſen to ſuch a height, that thoſe who are not accuſtomed to view things in this religious and moſt comforting light, might be ready to imagine that the Almighty had forſaken her, and that there is little uſe in ſerving him. Let us here number up her afflictions. She had ſeen with her own eyes the dreadful death of her father, ſhe had for a long time witneſſed the affecting condition of her mother, who uſed to follow her about the houſe, without knowing the hand by which ſhe was ſupported; *Mary*, beſides this, had attended the long and drooping ſickneſs of her two brothers; and now, having fallen ſick herſelf, being both weak in body, and ſadly enfeebled in her mind, ſhe was dwelling all alone in a little comfortleſs habitation, having been deprived by death of every one of thoſe dear relatives, the ſight of whom had many a time cheered her ſpirits, while the idea of ſupplying them with a comfortable ſubſiſtence, had been uſed to ſweeten her employment, and lighten the ſeverity of her toil.

It was at this period of her extremity that it pleaſed God to raiſe up for her ſome kind friends, in the manner which I ſhall now deſcribe.

A lady of the ſame village heard that a ſervant's place was vacant in a neighbouring family, and adviſed

viſed *Mary*, feeble as ſhe was, to preſent herſelf there, as a candidate to fill this comparatively eaſy and comfortable ſituation. Accordingly the poor girl, with an anxious heart, went to offer her ſervices; ſhe mentioned, with her uſual honeſty, what had been the habits of her former life, and what was the ſtate of her health alſo: it ſeemed undoubtedly much againſt her intereſt to do ſo, but it was perfectly right; and how can any of us hope for the bleſſing of God, or expect any true comfort in our minds when we fall into affliction, if we fly to unfair means of reſcuing ourſelves out of it; and inſtead of truſting in God, truſt to our own little frauds, and crooked contrivances.

The anſwer made to *Mary's* application was unfavourable, for it was thought, and indeed it was gently hinted, that a young woman, hitherto ſo much expoſed as ſhe had been, was not likely to prove a very fit inmate in a ſober private family.

*Mary* felt very keenly this unhappy ſuſpicion againſt her character; but what could ſhe do? ſhe walked very quietly away, with a down-caſt look, and with a mind quite broken down by this freſh affliction and diſaſter. The owners of the manſion happened however to obſerve her countenance, and the peculiar modeſty of her manner, as ſhe was taking her departure, for her patient and ſilent grief touched them far more ſenſibly than any loud complaints could have done, and they therefore determined to make ſome inquiries concerning her. The gentleman went himſelf on the ſame day to the colliery, where the maſter of the

pit

pit replied to his queſtions, nearly in the following terms. "Sir, ſaid he, ſhe is a poor girl that has over-worked herſelf, for ſhe has undertaken what we call taſk work, which is very hard labour; ſhe is one of the beſt girls that ever I knew, and is reſpected by all the colliers, and though (added he) I cannot deny that now and then my men take a cup too much, which is apt to make them ſometimes quarrelſome, yet they never ſuffer a bad word to be ſpoken or an affront to be offered to a girl in the pit, without puniſhing the fellow who may be guilty, and making him heartily aſhamed of himſelf."

This rule of decency and propriety towards young women, eſtabliſhed by a ſet of coarſe miners, is here recorded for the benefit of ſome of thoſe perſons, who are pleaſed to call themſelves their betters.

The Gentleman, after a very minute and full examination, was ſo well ſatisfied of the good character of *Mary*, that ſhe was received into his ſervice, in which ſhe has now been living comfortably for about the ſpace of ſix years. Her health is recovered, her habits of diligence are ſtill very great, and ſhe is ſaid to be of a remarkably modeſt, humble and contented ſpirit. It may not be improper to mention, that the maſter of the houſe in which ſhe is has furniſhed all the materials of this ſtory.

I will now take leave of my readers, by remarking, that the little tale which I have been reciting, ſeems to me to hold out the following uſeful leſſons.

In the firſt place, I think it may teach the poor, that they can ſeldom be in any condition of life ſo low, as to prevent their riſing to ſome degree of independence, if they chuſe to exert themſelves, and

and that there can be no situation whatever so mean, as to forbid the practice of many noble virtues. It may instruct the rich not to turn the poor from their doors, merely on account of first appearances, but rather to examine into their character, expecting sometimes to find peculiar modesty and merit, even in the most exposed situations. This story also may encourage the afflicted to serve and trust God in every extremity: and finally, it may teach all descriptions of persons, who may have to pass through dangerous and trying circumstances, that they may expect the divine protection and blessing, provided they are not needlessly throwing themselves in the way of temptation, but are endeavouring like *Mary* "to learn and labor truly to get their own living, "and to do their duty in that state of life, unto "which it hath pleased God to call them."

*On the 1st of June 1795. will be Published,*

A Sunday Reading; entitled, the Beggarly Boy a religious Parable.—The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, Part II.—Wild Robert, a Ballad.

*On the 1st of July.*

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